

## Volunteering in the Philippines: The Salamat Story

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## Volunteering in the Philippines: The Salamat Story

Robert HUGHES\*

### *Introduction*

As an associate professor in the Department of Regional Development Studies at Toyo University, Robert Hughes visited the Philippines on the first exploratory trips to find a location to run RDS Departmental English language programs. He expanded the program to investigate issues related to poverty and took a special interest in the problem of street children. He was instrumental in setting up the student circle Salamat and continues to oversee its operations in the Philippines.

This article recognizes that there are mutual benefits in combining intensive English language studies with specifically-focused volunteer NGO activities. Volunteer activities related to a specific social problem such as street children can engage students in a meaningful way to explore the implications of a serious topic such as poverty. Limited field exposure to specific problems can serve as the impetus for students to become more involved and eventually deeply committed to volunteer activities. English can serve as the communicative channel to initiate such an exploration. Thus, experiential learning is a very powerful motivational tool for students to develop their English competency and at the same time to investigate social issues and to make a difference in the lives of other people. Combining an intensive English language program with volunteer activities can lead students to join a committed volunteer group as has been the case at Toyo University with the international volunteer circle Salamat.

Since 2006, groups of up to thirty-two Toyo University students, mostly from the Faculty of Regional Development Studies (RDS), have participated in the South Western University Intensive English Language Program (SWU-IELP) in Cebu City, Philippines. The program lasts four weeks. Based upon the students experience and observations of the conditions in which poor children live, many students after their return to Japan have expressed desire to take action to help this cause. With these concerns in mind, participants of the 2007 summer program formed the Circle Salamat and they commenced activities late in 2007 to support children living in poverty in the Philippines. There

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has always been a strong connection between participation in the SWU English Language Program and Salamat membership, although participation in the SWU English Language Program is not a prerequisite for membership in Salamat.

The primary purpose of the formation of the circle Salamat was to provide a means for Toyo University students to assist Philippine children living in poverty in the greater Cebu area. Through various activities during the SWU Intensive English Language Program, students developed awareness of some of the issues connected to children living in poverty such as educational problems, inadequate housing, domestic trouble, and street life. Most Salamat members were first exposed to serious social issues in the Philippines while attending the SWU English Language Program. Outside of English studies in the SWU program, a variety of special lectures and field exposures provided background information on local social problems. Since 2006, 202 students have attended the SWU program while Salamat membership averages around thirty students per year. Salamat membership consists of students from first to fourth year and in fact, many members continue their volunteer involvement until graduation.

Salamat circle membership enables any interested Toyo University students an opportunity to contribute to the welfare of Philippine children through fundraising activities and periodic volunteer activities in the Philippines. Through these volunteer activities, Toyo University students have contributed directly to the benefit of Philippine children living in poverty.

## ***1. Background***

Representatives of the Department of Regional Development Studies at Toyo University made an exploratory trip to the Visayan region of the Philippines in 2005 to determine whether local universities had an interest in hosting Japanese students for an intensive English language program. Several locations were visited and finally a Memorandum of Agreement was completed between Toyo University and South Western University in 2006. The first group of participating students was recruited for the initial program in August and September of 2006.

For Japanese, studying English in the Philippines was a novel idea. However, it was something that had already been embraced by Koreans. According to data from the Philippine Bureau of Immigration which is the agency responsible for issuing study permits to foreign students, 5,877 South Koreans were given Special Study permits (SSP) in 2004. However, in 2005 the number shot up to 17,904 which was a three-fold increase. From 2004 to 2008, an average of 20,427 Korean students per year studied in the Philippines for an average of 1,702 students per month (Hicap 2009).

Seeing how enthusiastic the Korean students were in studying English in the Philippines was quite



an eye-opening experience. The overseas study program for RDS students at SWU in the Philippines was initially set up exclusively for intensive English language studies. The language program at South Western University was well-organized and emphasized oral communication skill building. In addition to classroom language instruction, six hours per week of “person to person” language practice with a tutor was also offered. Four hours per week of cultural studies were included in the curriculum. The students got daily opportunities to participate in meaningful language exchanges. Students reported great satisfaction with the program overall, but especially with the tutor/mentor arrangement. This is a feature that is not part of most intensive English language programs in developed countries as the remuneration for the tutors would make the program prohibitively expensive.

In addition to seeing first-hand the scenic beauty of tropical islands and participating in seaside recreational opportunities, it was not uncommon for the students to see children daily on the streets of Cebu begging for money. Furthermore, in the early morning and evenings, it was not uncommon to see children, adults, and in some cases, entire families sleeping on the sidewalks near urban centers.



Street Children (Photographs courtesy of Salamat)

These were disturbing experiences for the students as such scenes do not exist in Japan. In Cebu city, a well-known resort location, Toyo University students were confronted with poverty first-hand.



From the questions and concerns raised by the students, it became clear that they wanted to investigate and understand more about these issues. By branching out to the Department of Social Work at SWU and in particular with the help of Professor Zanoria, the head of the department, some initial lectures were arranged to study these domestic problems. Since that first program, Professor Zanoria has been instrumental in arranging guest lecturers and setting up field trips. An important development occurred when Professor Zanoria provided a list of all the local agencies and NGO operations that had joined together to create the Cebu City Taskforce to combat the problem of street children. The names of the groups, their addresses, and specific contact people were all listed and accessible. With introductions from Professor Zanoria, visits were made to all of the co-operating agencies and NGOs. Several of the NGOs were quite positive to the idea of cooperative activities with volunteer Toyo University students. The religious-based NGO “Christ for Asia” offered interesting and challenging opportunities for Toyo University students to interact with local children through their orphanage and school, the Nehemiah School of Opportunity. Another important development resulted from an introduction to Francisco Fernandez, the Managing Director of Pagtambayayong, a foundation for mutual aid.

Now each summer, Toyo students on the SWU English Language Program visit the Nehemiah home and school for abandoned and orphaned children, run by the NGO Christ For Asia. Through an annual pizza party sponsored by Toyo University students and direct activities such as teaching origami, Japanese songs, and dances, the children experience the warmth of caring, Toyo students. Then in the week following this event, students in teams of five or six members, accompany the CFA volunteers into slum areas and participate in feeding and educational activities for underprivileged children.

Visits have been made to the offices of Lihok Filipina Foundation and Pagtambayayong Foundation to understand how each NGO functions and what contributions they make to their communities. A tour of Pagtambayayong’s Center for Alternative Technology introduces students to the concept of low-cost housing materials. Students see interlocking earth blocks being produced. These blocks are for use as the primary building material in affordable housing for the poor. Nearby the brick factory is a community where students can inspect the cheap, high quality earth block homes made for families through a community mutual aid association organized by Pagtambayayong.

Special Saturday lectures by social workers have introduced students to problems in early childhood education providing a background for students to understand why children are on the streets. Successive groups have visited a new NGO operation called Train-A-child Ministry which offers elementary school level studies for underprivileged children. Two successive years of students were able to visit the Inawayan dumpsite and see the scavenger situation firsthand. This led to an initial visitation to the newly established San Pio community which was set up as a relocation community for the families that previously had been living around the dumpsite and in other dangerous flood prone areas.

Excursions have included visits to various other places depending on schedules, the weather, and what could be arranged. Previous field trips have included visits to a mountain community called Camp 7 where students are able to see how issues of sustainability are being practiced. In 2012, Toyo students joined with SWU students to engage in a reforestation effort on the outskirts of Cebu City.

Through these field trips, Toyo University students meet local people, interact with them, and develop cultural awareness. Participants are introduced to social issues such as poverty, a lack of educational opportunity, inadequate housing, and environmental issues. Most significantly, Toyo University students get an initiation to the complexity of the problem of “street children” and poverty.

## *2. The Salamat Circle at Toyo University*

Poverty in developing countries is highly visible and easy for all to see including tourists; yet, it remains difficult to understand as depicted below in figure 1. It is disturbing to see so many children begging on the streets, but for many children, the issue is survival. The chances of a meal on the street are often greater than at home. Most tourists will initially dole out the amount for a burger or snack; however, what they don't know is that it is illegal and tends to encourage the children to remain on the streets. This is dangerous as traffic accidents are not uncommon and predators lurk not far away. Programs focusing on prevention and intervention are continuing through the Cebu City Task-force. However, it became apparent through meetings with task-force agencies and NGOs that volunteer assistance would be helpful and welcomed.

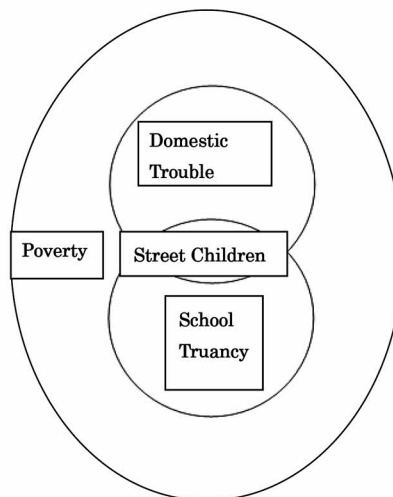


Fig.1

With the founding of Salamat in 2007, volunteers began fundraising efforts by collecting clothing and household goods in the communities around the Itakura campus of Toyo University. The initial fund-raising activities centered on recycling activity. Donated items from community residents were sold at a flea market at the university festival. Salamat volunteers also collected donations at various

station entrances. Donations were solicited from individuals and organizations. One of the first significant donations came as a cash donation from Heart Bazaar, a Toyo University student circle advocating fair trade principles.

Inspired by Heart Bazaar, Salamat also began the direct marketing of local Philippine products such as bags made from recycled juice packs by community members, and natural soap products made by a small enterprise on Mactan Island that provides employment to local girls who have dropped out of school. Campus activities have included lunch-time sales of cold tapioca-based drinks in summer and a soup kitchen in winter. Salamat members organized and held a New Year fundraising party in 2012 for 150 students. This proved to be a very successful event. The Salamat circle, to raise funds, participates in the annual Toyo University festival and this year Salamat volunteers sold banana-Q, a Philippine style fruit snack.

### ***3. Salamat Accomplishments Related to the Philippines***

Salamat members are active on campus at Toyo University raising funds to make important contributions to various projects in the Philippines. In addition to giving their time helping out with volunteer labor, funds are also contributed to select causes. In Japan, Salamat circle activities are used to raise funds, then during university breaks, a team of overseas volunteers is dispatched to get involved in the actual projects. The list below is an overview of such activities and projects:

- direct sponsorship of a child in Cebu at CFA (Mariel Tito) September 2009 (continuing)
- educational awareness showing the documentary Basura at Toyo University, November 2009
- direct monetary assistance for Train-A-Child Christmas Party in December 2009 and again in 2010. This included food distribution to resident families.
- distribution of school/art materials at Train-A-Child in March 2010
- distribution of recycled clothing at Aloma dump site, March 2010
- summer Cebu work camp including brick-making at Pagtambayayong's Center For Alternative Technology and volunteer construction work at the San Pio Community, September 2010 (including a computer donation and recycled clothing distribution)
- spring Cebu work camp at Pagtambayayong's Center for Alternative Technology and volunteer assistance on the CFA feeding program (NGO), March 2011
- summer Cebu work camp to begin construction of a Daycare Center for the Lumbani community, Sept. 2011
- spring Cebu work camp to continue construction on the Daycare Center for the Lumbani community, March 2012
- summer Cebu work camp to complete construction on the Daycare Center for the Lumbani community and volunteer work in Baraguay Luz to assist homeowners rebuilding after a fire. Sept.



2012.

With the assistance of well established NGO and agency connections in the greater Cebu area, Salamat members are able to share their time by physically challenging projects and by direct engagement with local residents.

#### *4. Child sponsorship in the Philippines*

Salamat members who attended the SWU-IELP have familiarity with the NGO Christ For Asia (CFA) and their Nehemiah School of Opportunities. They have visited the school and interacted with the children. CFA has always been very receptive to visits by Toyo students to interact with the CFA children.

In 2009, in support of CFA, Salamat members decided to commit to a serious responsibility: the sponsorship of a CFA child. Sponsorship entails an annual monetary payment of USD \$1,000 which covers all housing, food, and schooling expenses. Since the summer of 2009, Salamat has continued sponsorship of Mariel Tito. Sponsorship is like a foster-parent arrangement, except the “parents” are actually all the members of Salamat.



Mariel Tito at age 10

(Photographs courtesy of Salamat)



Mariel (bottom center) with Toyo students

At the time of sponsorship Mariel was ten years old. She was in grade 3 at the Nehemiah School of Opportunities (NSOI). Her situation was the case of a minor abandoned by the father. The mother works as an all around helper in the north Reclamation Area but has insufficient income to support the child. The mother's daily income is around 60 pesos a day (¥120). The Mobile School Team (in conjunction with the Cebu-city Taskforce) referred the child for admission to NSOI and for residential care and basic needs.

According to CFA social workers, Mariel is a quiet type but she is active and playful. She is cooperative, responsible and has leadership skills. She completes her tasks and has adjusted to life in the school and home but requires guidance and supervision from the house parents. In her school work, she functions as an average student. She shows interest in her studies. She is cooperative and participative in all undertakings. Toyo students attending the Southwestern University Summer Program and Salamat volunteers attending volunteer camps in Cebu enjoy stopping by to visit her. Mariel is now 13 years old and in grade 6 at school.

### ***5. Daycare Center Construction***

In March of 2010, three Salamat volunteers paid a special visit to a new NGO operation called “Train-A-child.” The purpose of the visit was to deliver educational materials that had been collected in Japan. The founder, social worker Zenith Diaz, previously lectured students in the summer IELP at SWU (2009) on problems in early childhood education. Her lectures provided a background so Toyo students could understand why children were living on the city streets.

After the visit to her new NGO operation, Ms. Diaz introduced the Salamat volunteers to a new community nearby of relocated scavengers from the city dumpsite. Approximately forty families had taken up residency in the new community.

Around the Cebu City garbage dump on flood prone land, dangerously near the mountain of reeking garbage, live dozens of families. They are squatters, living in poverty as part of the masses of urban poor found throughout the Philippines. Meager incomes are scratched out on the dump as family members including the children scavenge through the refuse as it is being dumped. Metal, plastic, and glass bring a few centavos. A family may net the equivalent of a few dollars each day. Most garbage is dumped at night. The scavengers work in the dark under dangerous conditions.

Through years of committed social work and daycare operations for the dump residents, Fr. John Iacono recognized that the squatters’ greatest concern was housing. Plans to close the dump were causing residents unease as they were to be eventually forced out of their poorly constructed tenements, their patchwork homes of corrugated metal and wood scraps. The little they had was going to be taken away. Without housing, their children would end up living on the streets.

With these concerns in mind, Fr. Iacono, a resident Catholic priest, worked with others to raise funds in Australia to purchase three hectares of land to start the San Pio Community in Dumlog, Talisay. The goal was to relocate the squatter families into a safe environment. In this new community, the united effort of several NGOs gained momentum. Habitat For Humanity busily added blocks of twenty family dwellings to the twenty or so that already existed. Engineers from Pagtambayayong, a



Foundation For Mutual Aid actively supervised the construction of new, steel-framed concrete-walled homes. In the shade of a large mango tree discussions were held and decisions were made. There, Margarita Maria Matheu articulated her vision for the San Pio Village. To the Salamat volunteers, she explained it was to be a safe place for children to grow up. Ms. Matheu is the managing trustee of the San Pio Foundation and the director of the project.

In discussion with Ms. Matheu, it was arranged for Salamat members to contribute volunteer labor on the construction site of the community's daycare and livelihood center. In September of 2010, a team of ten Salamat volunteers and three Canadian volunteers went to Cebu. They spent the first few days of a two week trip making bricks at the Pagtambayong Center for Alternative Technology.



Salamat volunteer Yoshiki Hagiwara demonstrating the operation of the GEO 50 earth-block press



Salamat volunteers with their newly made earth-blocks (Photographs courtesy of Salamat)

Then the Salamat volunteers shifted their focus to foundation and wall construction using the Pagtambayayong interlocking earth blocks at the San Pio site. This was invaluable experience as most of the Toyo students had never done any construction work.



Salamat members learning how to lay the earth blocks at the San Pio community



## ***6. Lumbani Project***

Having gained experience in construction while working as volunteers at San Pio, Salamat members expressed interest in continuing these kinds of labor intensive projects. Talks were held to determine the feasibility of financing and contributing labor for a smaller scale daycare/livelihood center for a community in need. Salamat members were leery about any kind of large financial commitment as the estimated amount was the equivalent of ¥1,500,000. Such a large amount seemed way beyond the scope of Salamat annual fundraising activities. However, Robert Hughes provided assurance that a large amount of financial support could be obtained through groups and individuals in Canada.

In March of 2011, the next Salamat volunteer team went to Cebu and conducted volunteer brick-making at the Pagtambayayong Center for Alternative Technology. Additional volunteer activities included participation in the CFA mobile feeding program for street children. Talks were held directly with the administrative staff and engineers at Pagtambayong. Field workers and education specialists from Pagtambayong guided Salamat members for location inspections at two different communities where there was the possibility of donating funds and labor to construct daycare/livelihood centers.

After the Salamat members returned to Japan, correspondence continued with Pagtambayong. Due to land ownership issues, neither site was available for such a construction project. However, in Barangay Quadaulupe of Cebu city, the Lumbani Home Owner's Association had title to a small piece of land for exactly this purpose. A Memorandum of Agreement was signed by representatives of Pagtambayong and Robert Hughes on behalf of Salamat to build a daycare/livelihood center for the Lumbani Homeowners Association. In other words, Robert Hughes accepted legal responsibility to cover the cost of the project in the event that the Salamat circle could not cover the cost. The agreement stated that Salamat would finance the entire amount of 780,000 Philippine pesos (¥1,560,000) for the construction of a small, two storied building to be used by the community as a daycare facility for children and as a livelihood training center for adults in need of job skills. Through close acquaintances and family in Canada, one million yen was raised. The Genbukan Karate Organization in Lloydminster, Alberta under chief instructor Cam Steuart held a special one day seminar for martial arts training. All participant fees plus two generous personal donations resulted in a donation of CAN \$5,000 (yen 400,000). Relatives of Robert Hughes in the community of Eston, Saskatchewan raised Can \$8,000 (yen 640,000) and contributed the entire amount to the project. The remaining amount of yen 520,000 has been contributed by Salamat fundraising and personal contributions by Robert Hughes.

In September of 2011, student volunteers began working on the project with Pagtambayayong laborers and chief engineer Sandy Galila. During this two week volunteer camp, Salamat volunteers helped to level the building site on a hillside, pour the concrete foundations, and construct the walls for first floor of the building using the interlocking earth blocks supplied by Pagtambayayong. Thousands

of earth-blocks were passed along a winding human chain and stacked near the construction site. Many of the neighborhood children assisted in this effort. Each earth-block weighed 6.5 kilograms. It was a monumental task getting the earth blocks up to the hillside site as there was no vehicle access to this site.



The first floor walls going up!



Maya mortaring the earth blocks!



Ai Yamashita laying bricks!



Lots of Pagtambayayong earth blocks

In March and in September of 2012, two additional teams of Salamat volunteers went to Cebu to work on the Lumbani daycare/livelihood center project. In the interim period, laborers from Pagtambayayong had continued to work on the project. The March volunteer team worked almost exclusively on interior and exterior wall finishing. Both internal and external surfaces had to be plastered and sanded down prior to application of paint. Outside the building, hard labor was needed to continue expanding the available space for the children's playground. Beneath the hillside topsoil was limestone which had to be chipped away with heavy bars. In September, Salamat volunteers painted exterior walls and continued excavating the hillside for the expansion of space for the children's playground.





Time to start on the exterior!  
(Photographs courtesy of Salamat)



Sanding and painting nearly complete!

Through the SWU-IELP, studies at Toyo University, and involvement in Salamat, students have come to the realization that volunteer activities can have a lasting impact when focused at the level of prevention. A daycare/livelihood center built to a community's specifications will free mothers from parenting duties and allow them time to develop work skills to earn additional income to support their families. This will improve the home situation for children and if successful will help keep these children safe within their community and off the streets.



On June 18 of 2012, twenty-seven children from the Lumbani community enrolled in the daycare program and classes began. The Barangay of Guadalupe had arranged for a trained professional to begin instruction for the children in this community.





Salamat Volunteers with daycare students



Lumbani Daycare teacher!

## 7. Conclusion

Salamat is an active circle with several senior members who joined the circle in their first year at Toyo University. These students have taken on some major challenges and seen their projects through to completion. Salamat members wish to thank Toyo University for the support they have received to travel to the Philippines to offer volunteer services. Salamat celebrates the 125th Anniversary of Toyo University with the completion of the Lumabani Daycare facility in Guadalupe, Cebu city, Philippines.

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## Appendix 1: Participation in Summer ELP Program at SWU

2006	29 participants
2007	29 participants
2008	28 participants
2009	25 participants
2010	26 participants
2011	33 participants
2012	32 participants
Total participants	202

## フィリピンにおけるサラムットのボランティア活動

ロバート・ヒューズ

この論文では、サラムット (Salamat) の活動を取り上げている。サラムットは、東洋大学国際地域学部の学生のボランティア団体語学研修から派生した、学生のボランティア団体である。研修先のセブ (フィリピン) でストリートチルドレンの存在を目にした学生たちは、地元の NGO と連携してさまざまな支援活動に乗り出していく。2007 年から現在にいたるその活動について論述している。

キーワード：学生ボランティア、ストリートチルドレン、セブ市。